DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 438 622 EA 030 262

AUTHOR	Capper, Colleen A.; Keyes, Maureen W.; Hafner, Madeline
TITLE	Toward a Pluralistic View of Accountability: Possibilities and Troublings.
PUB DATE	1999-10-00
NOTE	46p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University Council of Educational Administration (Minneapolis, Minnesota, October 28-31, 1999).
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Accountability; Achievement Tests; Educational Administration; Elementary Secondary Education; *Epistemology; Evaluation Criteria; *Performance Based Assessment; *Student Evaluation

ABSTRACT

This paper examines ways to help administrators and scholars in administrator preparation make sense of the accountability debates. It links possibilities for accountability to one's epistemological lens and claims that administrators can enhance student success by taking a pluralistic view of accountability. The text recounts the historical context for epistemological perspectives, followed by an explanation of epistemological pluralism. It shows how various kinds of student assessments, whether they are traditional or progressive in structural-functional or feminist-poststructural ways, can be used. The article focuses on epistemological proliferation and examines three different ways to view epistemological pluralism: (1) exclusivism, where persons believe their perspective is the one correct perspective; (2) inclusivism, where persons believe that their view is so superior that it includes all other perspectives; and (3) pluralism, where persons hold that "truths" about learning and accountability cannot be captured by one particular perspective. The article offers a brief description of standardized, performance-based, and functional assessments along with examples of how each method can be employed in various manners. It is hoped that using traditional assessment under these perspectives will advance equity and justice, allowing educators to use alternative assessments to maintain the status quo. (Contains 24 references, 3 tables, and 3 handouts.) (RJM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 438 622

Toward a Pluralistic View of Accountability: Possibilities and Troublings

Colleen A. Capper
Associate Professor
UW Madison
Department of Educational Administration
1025 Educational Sciences Building
1025 W. Johnson Street
Madison, WI 53706
E-mail:capper@education.wisc.edu

Maureen W. Keyes
Assistant Professor
UW Milwaukee
Department of Exceptional Education
P.O. Box 413 Enderis 6th Floor
Milwaukee, WI 53201
E-mail: mkeyes@uwm.edu

Madeline Hafner
Ph.D. Candidate
Department of Educational Administration
UW Madison
Educational Sciences Building
1025 W. Johnson Street
Madison, WI 53706
Email: mmhafner@students.wisc.edu

Paper presented at the University Council of Educational Administration
Annual Meeting
Minneapolis, Minnesota
October 28-31, 1999

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
C. Capper
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Toward a Pluralistic View of Accountability

Though we are not totally enthusiastic about the standards-based reform that is sweeping the country, with our own children's education we have directly experienced how a lack of standards, obscure expectations and inadequate assessment can thwart academic success and rob a child's self-esteem. Colleen's son Quinn recently had his first experience with standardized assessment as a third grader with the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. Colleen volunteers each Thursday morning and her duties included helping his teacher darken the dots on each exam cover page to code each student's name and birth-date. The following week, Colleen helped "monitor" the actual test taking, keeping track of time, and helping students be sure they did not have any "stray marks" on their papers. The tests consumed all instructional time that week, eight hours of actual test taking plus all the time associated with giving directions, breaks, and transitions. Additional time was spent the previous week taking practice tests to get ready. Quinn reported, "I am not worried about the Iowa tests, because they only show what you know. The teacher is not grading them . . . . and for that I am relieved!" I cringed when I imagined the pressure he would have experienced had his school used the exams to make "high stakes" decisions about moving to the next grade. His teacher sweetened the deal by not assigning homework the entire week, providing plenty of extra snacks throughout the day, and allowing for additional recess time each afternoon. Though Colleen is generally opposed to such testing, she has displayed an unusual degree of uncritical, modernist parenting over the years by subtly teaching Quinn strategies for completing work ("Do the easier ones first, carefully read the directions, be clear what they are asking you to do, be systematic in your work, carefully examine each line, and check your work."). She did not want to scare or depress him, but reminded him

he would have a test like this one every year he was in school, and thus, it was a good idea to get really good at taking such tests and to have a good attitude toward them.

The debates surrounding student accountability have taken on many hues in recent years. We have been disappointed with the arguments taken by both sides of the issue. Some educators argue against conventional forms of accountability such as tests that students take at particular grade levels to determine if they will pass on to the next grade (see the entire issue of Rethinking Schools, Spring, 1999). These educators wish to eliminate all forms of norm-based testing (i.e., tests that require students to darken the circle in response to questions) and instead, rely on performance-based and other alternative assessments for students (Lyman, 1999). While we disagree with most aspects of standardized tests and their use, educators who simply deride their use do not help us when, at least in the near future, our children in K-12 education will be expected to take them. Further, if our children wish to continue their education (e.g., college, graduate school, professional schools), or even to take their driver's exam, they will be expected to perform well on such tests. A few educators also believe that using norm-based accountability measures can erase teacher bias and low expectations for typically-marginalized students (e.g., from race and class).

The purpose of this paper is to help practicing administrators and scholars in administrator preparation "make sense" of the accountability debates by considering some possibilities for accountability depending on one's epistemological lens. Instead of being locked in either/or accountability positions, we argue that administrators can provide the conditions for student success by taking a pluralistic view of accountability. Understanding the epistemological basis for differing uses of accountability provides one avenue for this pluralistic view. First, we

describe an historical context for epistemological perspectives, followed by an explanation of epistemological pluralism. Then we show how we can use various kinds of student assessments, whether they are traditional or progressive in structural functional or feminist poststructural ways. This demonstration also shows some limits of pluralism and we end the paper with an interrogation of this paper and unanswered questions.

Epistemological Proliferation

Over the years, the social sciences in general, and the field of education in particular, have witnessed scholars advocating a proliferation of nontraditional epistemological perspectives--all claiming these perspectives are alternative to positivist science. Some scholars have mapped these differing epistemologies into a variety of conceptual schema. For example, Burrell and Morgan (1989) outlined four epistemological perspectives from philosophy and science: structural functionalism, interpretivism, radical humanism, and radical structuralism. Building on Burrell and Morgans work, some scholars have combined the latter two perspectives and contend that critical theory can capture the ideas found there.

Scheurich and Young (1997) describe the various epistemological debates in the field " . . . quantitative versus qualitative . . . objectivity versus subjectivity. . . . . validity. . or paradigmatic issues in general. . . ." (p. 4). In the past ten years, critical methodologists have joined the debate, advocating critical ethnography and other types of research that take equity and justice as their central focus, and indeed, seeks to "make a difference" in the field as a result of the research (e.g., Gitlin, 1994). Feminists joined the epistemological chorus and promulgated ways of knowing and research that pivots on women's experience (e.g., Luke, 1992). Most recently, postmodern scholars have attempted not only to articulate postmodern epistemologies

and their application to education (Cherryholmes, 1988; Popkewitz, 1984), but also what postmodern ideas might mean for educational research (Lather, 1991; Scheurich, 1997).

Concomitantly, others have called for epistemologies and research methods that position the experience of typically marginalized persons at the center. For example, Collins (1991, 1998) articulates an Afrocentric feminist epistemology. Scheurich and Young (1997) agree, advocating that all research and their associated epistemologies are epistemologically racist, and that we should position race at the center of research. Britzman (1995) and Honeychurch (1996) believe that we have ignored queer centered research and ways of knowing in academe, and consider what a queer epistemology might mean not only for educational research, but also practice.

In the late 80's, the differing views between quantitative and qualitative researchers were dubbed "the paradigm wars," that led to a pre-conference session at AERA in 1989 and an edited book entitled "The Paradigm Dialogue" (Lincoln, et al., 1990). Though a dialogue was initiated, a decade has passed and the age of accountability has arrived. With the proliferation of alternative epistemologies beyond the qualitative/quantitative debate, and with the increasing societal diversity and multiple ways of knowing that diverse cultures bring to education, we need to reconsider this "dialogue." Here, we do so in the context of accountability. At best, scholars may acknowledge accountability schemes rooted in differing epistemologies and overtly acknowledge their existence, but implicitly or explicitly maintain the supremacy of their own preferred perspective, which supersedes and is independent of other approaches. At worst, educators, may fail to accord legitimacy to the fact that other measures of accountability may be useful in knowing what and how students learn. A balance between these two extremes is possible.

Toward Epistemological Pluralism

Here, we describe three different ways to view this epistemological proliferation and what this could mean for educational accountability (see Eck, 1995, who applies these ideas to theology) (see Table 1). First, some people believe in epistemological **exclusivism**. That is, they believe that their epistemological perspective is the one correct perspective in the world. This exclusivism can be as true for those who follow traditional approaches as those who take alternative perspectives. Exclusivists believe certain writers, teachers, or ideas harbor the one correct way to view the world, and these writers and teachers' names are bandied about as a way to legitimate their ideas. Because they believe only one perspective can exist, they view other perspectives or differences as threatening. Exclusivism is marked by strict boundaries around identity--choice is threatening. Exclusivists are highly negative toward other ways of knowing, and do not participate in dialogue, but debate to win. Often, those from nontraditional perspectives or marginalized group status in society are afraid not to be exclusive, for fear their epistemology and personhood will be absorbed into the dominant epistemology.

Other people subscribe to an epistemological **inclusivism**. That is, they believe their favored epistemology is the superior view, and that their view is so superior, it includes all other perspectives within it. Inclusivism can be compared with a wide umbrella, with a particular perspective being the umbrella, and all other perspectives are included underneath it. With inclusivism, we take someone else's perspectives or values, and incorporate them into our own, and our perspective always comes out on top. When we take an inclusive view of varying epistemologies, we spend much time and energy *translating* and sorting through other

perspectives to fit into our own. Inclusivists include other epistemologies on their own terms, and use their own language to interpret other epistemologies.

A third approach to epistemological proliferation is the practice of epistemological **pluralism.** With pluralism, we believe that "truths" about learning, and accountability are not and cannot be captured by one particular perspective. With pluralism, we believe that different educational issues such as accountability are beyond any particular epistemological tradition and that there is something to be learned from all traditions. We can better understand pluralism, by considering what it is not.

Pluralism is not diversity. Diversity is a fact of life. Pluralism is a response to diversity. Pluralism is not relativism where we believe that a commitment to a particular approach is pointless. A pluralist view requires we explore accountability from different epistemological perspectives while maintaining a commitment to our own perspective. A pluralistic view of accountability is not simply choosing our preferred way of assessment from the array of student assessments, (e.g., standardized, performance-based) and then staying open to what the other assessments offer. Though this practice is certainly a step forward from being wedded to a singular assessment approach, a pluralistic view of accountability moves beyond this. A pluralistic view of accountability is also not simply picking the "good stuff" from each of the accountability measures and leaving behind aspects of those assessments we find oppressive. A pluralistic view of accountability requires us to deconstruct the epistemological basis of assessment and in this case, locate liberating aspects in seemingly oppressive assessments and how progressive accountability approaches can be constraining.

Just because pluralism suggests we can learn something from all epistemologies does not mean we abandon our own preferred epistemology. Pluralism suggests that when we begin exploring other perspectives or being open to learning from them, we can't help but be changed ourselves in some way, a change that can include deepening into our own perspective with a renewed openness. Regardless which epistemological perspectives we prefer, our belief about these perspectives can vary along a continuum from exclusivism to pluralism (see Figure 1).

Taking multiple perspectives of education is not new. For example, critical inquiry, developed by Sirotnik and Oakes (1986) is grounded in a combination of structural functionalism, interpretivism, and critical theory. Popkewitz (1988) also explains these same three perspectives and their utility for education research. Scholars have also offered different perspectives of research; for example, Bensimon (1991) reframed her data analysis related to university leadership from structural functional/interpretive perspectives to feminist perspectives. Lather (1991) used data generated from journals and interviews with students in women's studies courses to juxtapose four perspectives against each other and against the data, spinning four "tales": realist, critical, deconstructivist, and reflexive. Cherryholmes (1993) reframed research on reciprocal teaching of comprehension, by viewing data from four perspectives: feminist theory, critical theory, deconstruction, and critical pragmatism.

Griffiths (1995) problematizes multiparadigmatic research and advocates for the movement from paradigm to theory-focused research. Comparing epistemological pluralism in detail to Griffith's arguments are beyond the scope of this paper. However, Griffith's argues we should not be concerned with different epistemological perspectives (in his words, different paradigms) and instead focus on individual theories (little t). One problem with ignoring

epistemology and focusing on *theoretical* pluralism can be demonstrated with one of Griffith's examples. He states: ". . . . research could utilize a wide range of theories in the solution of problems and select the most appropriate theory or theories for a particular problem" (p. 306). What Griffith's does not acknowledge is what is considered a "problem" in the first place depends on one's epistemological perspective.

Though some scholars have considered using differing epistemologies in research and practice, no one has framed the consideration along a continuum from exclusivism to pluralism, nor has anyone considered the utility of this pluralistic perspective for educational practices such as accountability.

Student Assessments and Accountability

In the following sections, we offer a brief description of standardized, performance-based, and functional assessments along with examples of how we can use each method in a structural functional or feminist poststructural manner. In this way, we show that we can use traditional assessments in ways that can advance equity and justice, and we can use alternative assessments like performance-based approaches to maintain the status quo.

Standardized Assessments[1]

A standardized test typically measures cognitive skills that we then measure against a normed sample. We administer these tests to students with the same directions, questions, and time limits. Most standardized tests are multiple choice, however open-ended questions have recently been added to this type of exam. Beginning with the Stanford Binet in the 1920's, such tests were initially used to exclude individuals from the military and educational settings and to set quotas recommended for immigration. Thankfully, the normative sample that companies use

to validate their results and the ability to generalize across a vast segment of the population has evolved over time. However, clearly such assessment practices are currently not bias-free assessment measures even today.

How we can use standardized assessments in structural functional ways.

From structural functional perspectives we can use standardized assessments to determine patterns of performance within certain groups (those using certain materials, specific teaching strategies, amount of time in class, race, social class, gender, etc.). From this perspective, we examine those who do not perform well and provide treatments to increase their performance. We utilize results to generate more resources for students/classrooms/schools in need. A structural functional way of using standardized assessments would include reinforcing to students and families the significance of test results. Based on analysis of results, we would work to make tests more accurate in measuring what students learn.

How we can use standardized assessments in feminist poststructural ways.

Educators taking feminist poststructural perspectives take three interrelated approaches to standardized assessments. First, they make the accountability discourse visible as a discourse that is not neutral. Second, they use this visibility to help them plan ways to maneuver within that system to ensure student success. Third, while maneuvering within the assessment system, they recognize the limits of that system and they continue to work toward overhauling it. Linda Christensen, a high school teacher from Oregon provides one example of a feminist poststructural approach to high stakes standardized assessments at her school (1999). She states:

> The question for anyone who cares about kids is how do we retain our critical stance on assessments while preparing students for them? . . . . . I am a firm advocate in fighting

> against the over-assessment of students. But I also believe we must seize the opening to demystify the tests–to help our students critically analyze these exams and the assumptions behind them–as well as motivate them and coach them in test taking skills so they may potentially be able to increase their performance (p. 14).

Christensen (1999) then explains steps she has taken in this direction. First, she works with students to question the origins and purposes of these tests. Questions she and her students explore include, "Who made the tests? What are the tests supposed to measure? How will the test scores be used?" If the tests purport to assess student abilities to improve instruction do the timing of the tests and how results are shared preclude this from happening? What other measures do teachers have to assess student learning to improve their teaching? Examining the origin of tests included examining the origin of the SAT. Christensen suggests having students read a chapter from David Owen's book None of the Above called "The Cult of Mental Measurement."(see also an article on the origins of the SAT in the September 6, 1999 issue of Newsweek magazine, and an article by Bigelow in *Rethinking Our Classroom*).

Second, she and her students scrutinize the test scores, comparing schools and disaggregating the data based on gender, social class, and race. Christensen (1999) suggests, "This one is tricky because you don't want to leave the students with the idea that race or income are indicators of intelligence or the only factors determining academic achievement. It is important to examine the questions to see how the content might favor one race or one gender or one income bracket" (p. 14).

Third, students can also question how the test results are used. "Who benefits if they get high scores? Are students placed in honors or remedial classes? Given scholarships? Special

programs? Are teachers' or principals' salaries tied to the results?" (p. 14). Christensen has students interview various stakeholders about how students are placed in various programs and to what extent a test score used.

Fourth, one way to improve performance is to examine the content and format of the tests. Christensen and her students examine the vocabulary, how questions are constructed, the objectives, how analogies are constructed, and how often the vocabulary reflected upper class culture. (She suggests using *The Princeton Review: Cracking the SAT*).

Next, in pairs, students wrote their own achievement tests, based on their own cultures and the culture of their school. They then took their test to a teacher education class at a local university and asked the class to take the test and assume it was high stakes, stating that it would determine whether they would become credentialed as a teacher or receive scholarships. Her students talked with the class about their understanding about testing and language. Christensen (1999) noted, "[This experience] made them see that if they were the test makers, using their culture and their vocabulary, they could also devise a test that could be used to exclude some and include others" (p. 18).

At the end of her description, Christensen (1999) repeats what we believe to be her feminist poststructural stance, "Teaching students to examine the history and motives of local and state tests and preparing them for the big day(s), is no substitute for fighting to end the encroachment of assessments in our classrooms . . . The work I've proposed may demystify the tests and help students question their legitimacy; our bigger work as [educators] is to engage in the battle to stop testing that makes young people. . . question their ability" (p. 18).

This example suggests that, from feminist poststructural perspectives, educators can use standards-based assessments to develop ongoing local dialogue with students and families about how different discourses of accountability are represented in their school. We can deconstruct the tests with students, focusing conversation on which academic concepts are being tested, the language used throughout the test, and the structure of the test itself (Christensen, 1999). We could discuss the multiple differences between test scores and student abilities and how scores differ depending under what conditions the test is taken. Students can realize significance of test results but that results are not an indication of innate ability. Educators can use the tests as only one measure of student learning and teacher performance.

Further, instead of simply being critical of such tests, educators can use the test results to ask themselves what they can do differently. For example, though several third grade students may find that a standardized test does not match their learning style or they have such low reading skills they are unable to take the test, we do not believe that simply critiquing the test and referring these students to a special program is the answer (see Lyman, 1999). Another option could be collaborating with colleagues in the earlier grades and critiquing why students are so ill-prepared to take the tests in the first place and what teachers can do to increase student readiness in the preceding grades.

Performance Based Assessments

Performance-based assessments demonstrate what a student knows and how that student's work has developed over time in the particular setting where the assessment is given. Performance-based assessments can be both criteria referenced and individually referenced. Performance-based assessments are offered in a variety of formats and across many school

environments. Formats include portfolio assessments, performance exams, exhibitions, parent conferences, school report cards, and school quality review teams (Peterson & Neill, 1999). Performance-based assessments show up-to-date work for educators to monitor individual student growth. Common performance-based assessment formats include the portfolio assessment and performance exams.

With portfolio assessments student work is collected over a period of time to demonstrate student progress. Portfolios show the product of what students have learned and the process they have gone through to learn that information. Performance exams are "tests given to all students, based on students performing a certain task, such as writing an essay, conducting a science experiment, or doing an oral presentation which is videotaped" (Peterson & Neill, 1999, p. 5). These exams actively involve and evaluate students in hands-on learning.

How we can use performance based assessments in structural functional ways.

From structural functional perspectives a performance-based assessment, when utilized as a criteria referenced assessment, is useful in demonstrating student progress. Performance based assessments challenge students to demonstrate that they comprehend and can perform established curricular objectives. We then measure student comprehension and performance against a standard already established by experts in individual academic areas of education.

From structural functional perspectives performance-based assessments are time intensive and yield results that we could obtain in a more efficient mode of assessment for most students. However these types of assessments do demonstrate the linear development of skills that we expect of students in schools and as such we could utilize this type of assessment when there is a

discrepancy between a child's ability level and achievement level as represented by standardized forms of assessments.

How we can use performance based assessments in feminist poststructural ways.

From feminist poststructural perspectives a performance based assessment is an empowering testimony of student understanding. We hold students and educators accountable for both the process and product of learning. Since performance-based assessment can be both criterion referenced and individually referenced, we consider a broader view of student learning. The construct of success becomes shaken up when performance based assessments are used. From this perspective, individual constructions of success are given voice as well as the established definitions. Recognizing that the ideas of success and growth and performance are not value neutral terms, educators would trouble these concepts by critically analyzing the criteria references of successful learning, compare and contrast this analysis with individual references of successful learning, and then plan a course of action that harnessed each student's power to negotiate those perceived differences.

It is important to note that feminist poststructural perspectives of performance based assessments, as with other perspectives, share a danger of maintaining oppressive practices toward some students. Simply problematizing constructs such as "success" or "growth" could constrain student learning. Using portfolios, for example, to demonstrate a third grade student's reading progress throughout the school year without addressing the issue of reading "above, below, or on grade level" could be viewed as a disservice to students.

Functional Assessments

Educators have developed functional assessments from a need to obtain specific information about students' strengths and where they need support, and gain a more comprehensive understanding about how students learn specific skills. Educators also developed functional assessments as a response to the use of norm-referenced testing with populations for whom we did not reference the test, for example, students with multiple and severe cognitive disabilities.

A discrepancy analysis of functional skills (Brown, 1982) is a key component of a functional assessment. We define a functional skill as a skill that will increase a student's independence and quality of life. These skills may consist of "every day" life skills, such as getting a glass of water or combing your hair, or specific behavioral, social, or vocational skills.

A functional assessment discrepancy analysis is key to assessing functional skills. This analysis assesses the functional skills a student is able and not able to do - focusing specifically on those skills that enhance a student's independence and quality of life based on the chronological age of the student. We compare the skills the student can do to a list of skills that would increase the student's independence and the discrepancy between the two becomes the student's goals. The skills identified in this discrepancy analysis are concrete and practical. A teacher can easily create teaching and learning opportunities based on this analysis.

Although functional assessments have been available to educators for more than two decades many educators have limited their use to only those students we have labeled with severe and multiple disabilities or students who are experiencing severe behavior problems at school and are involved in suspension and expulsion proceedings. A functional assessment can be used

as a proactive approach for learners who do not follow the school discipline plan, are labeled with a behavior or social disability, or are receiving vocational or functional curriculum in the community. A functional approach to assessment allows educators to focus individual goals for learning within the broader context of building and district level accountability measures.

How we can use functional assessments in structural functional ways.

From structural functional perspectives a functional assessment offers a step by step means of assisting students who are not currently meeting established educational expectations. A functional assessment analyzes where a student is not functioning as compared with same age peers and points out exactly which specific skills need to be taught. Established educational expectations are the baseline from which student behavior is compared. We easily measure student growth since a functional assessment shows exactly where within a sequence of skills a student falls short and how far the student needs to grow to reach the expected level of performance.

Structural functional perspectives would use this mode of assessment as a measure of student accountability when a student's skill level is dramatically different from that of the student's peers. Since functional assessments are more time intensive than other forms of assessments, we would use them only when students are having trouble achieving basic curricular, behavioral, or social expectations and goals as defined by existing norms and standards.

How we can use functional assessments in feminist poststructural ways.

From feminist poststructural perspectives a functional assessment problematizes the notion of standardization by focusing on individual measures of success instead of measures of

success constructed by one group for other groups. Functional assessment takes into consideration local ways of knowing by redefining what constitutes "curriculum" and what "instruction" might look like for individual students. It asks students themselves and the people closest to them to define what they consider an independent and increased quality of life and then we build teaching and learning experiences around those locally defined goals of school.

Recognizing that schools typically use functional assessments as a measure of student accountability for a small number of students, feminist poststructural perspectives would challenge educators to use functional assessments as they negotiate individual students', families', colleagues', and communities' definitions of student independence and increased quality of life. We could conduct a discrepancy analysis to show how different people within particular educational systems describe goals of schooling. Once these differences are consciously recognized then a discussion of how different goals of schooling lead to different ends could take place. Students, families, and educators could then discuss what steps individual students need to take, and what supports educators need to provide for that student to be successful within the present system of schooling.

Interrogating and Troubling Ourselves

In this paper, we used the example of accountability to illustrate the use of epistemological pluralism in two ways. We showed how a traditional assessment like standardized assessment could be used toward democratic ends. We also suggested ways that progressive assessments like performance-based assessments could be used in ways that constrain student learning. Further, within one kind of assessment, like standardized assessment, we posed two ways–supported by two different epistemological perspectives–to

view such assessment. Here we will assess ourselves (structural functionally by positioning ourselves against a set criteria and framing the question as a yes or no question) to determine to what extent we followed epistemological pluralism based on Table 1.

Troublings From Pluralism

1. Did we show that truths and ways of knowing and learning are not and cannot be captured by one particular perspective?

We could have provided some additional examples of empowering uses of traditional assessments.

2. Did we show that we can learn something from all traditions?

We think we did. Though it seems the more we learn about the origins of standardized assessments like the SAT it becomes more difficult to being open to learning from some types of assessments.

3. Did we suggest that we believe a commitment to a particular perspective is pointless and that all perspectives are "relative.?"

No. Our writing and the way we privilege feminist poststructuralism by allowing its discourse to take up more space suggests we are more committed to a feminist poststructural view than others.

4. Did we maintain our commitment to our perspective but were open to looking at other perspectives?

Yes, we did maintain our commitment to our perspective and we were open to other perspectives, for example locating positive examples of structural functional perspectives of standardized assessments.

5. Just because we can learn something from all epistemologies, did we abandon our preferred epistemology?

No. Though when we started writing the paper we were perhaps going to say all forms of assessment are OK, they all have something to offer, the "I'm OK, You're OK" perspective, we ended up favoring feminist poststructuralist perspectives. The democratic goal of schooling steered our thinking that perhaps not all forms or uses of student assessment are Okay.

6. Were our views changed in anyway by examining perspectives other than our own and did that examination result in us deepening into our own perspective?

When we first read Kate Lyman's article in Rethinking Schools, we empathized with her struggles with administering the Wisconsin Third Grade Reading Test to her students but because of our own experiences with our own children, we believed there had to be something more than just the critical-theory-oriented view of standardized testing. Probing further into standardized tests was helpful and helped us think more clearly how feminist poststructuralism might inform our use of them.

Troublings From Exclusivism

Next, since in this piece, feminist poststructuralism is our preferred perspective, we will interrogate ourselves by assessing our views (again in a structural functional way) to determine if we practiced epistemological exclusivism.

Do we believe our perspective is the one correct perspective of the world? Do we view other perspectives or choices as threatening?

Among nontraditional perspectives (e.g., queer, feminist, critical race), no. We do not feel threatened by epistemological choices, however, in our accountability examples, we do not

feel comfortable with saying, "It is OK if you choose to use the assessments in structural functional ways." Returning to our opening example, Quinn's teacher did not like having to give the Iowa Tests and bemoaned the amount of instructional time she lost. She will use the results as only one aspect of each student's work portfolio. She was quite sensitive to knowing the test measured only one aspect of student learning, and said, "If [the powers that be] want to know where the kids are, they should just ask me!" Unlike the high school teacher cited in this paper, however, she did not problematize the tests with the students although it is difficult to say what is appropriate for students at this grade level. Importantly, the assessments were not used to make grade retention or programmatic decisions. Thus, we could say in this case, the assessment was used, not critically, but perhaps interpretively. Thus, from our perspective using standardized assessments interpretively is "better than" structural functional uses.

Possibilities

For us, this is where the line between exclusivism and pluralism blurs. If we acknowledge–as pluralism does--we can learn something from all perspectives but maintain our allegiance to our own perspective, how can we not say our perspective is not "more correct" as exclusivism claims? Given that public schools exist within a democratic society, how can feminist poststructural uses of accountability be one of many options, and not the primary option if we believe in full citizenship and participation?

The continually increasing social and cultural diversity in society and the accompanying proliferation of accountability measures requires a renewed discussion on how such diversity of opinions and ideas might be viewed. Do we need to sort out what should endure and what shouldn't among the various accountability schemes? We offer pluralism as an alternative to an

either/or view of accountability. Considering how traditional forms of accountability could be used toward democratic ends and how progressive forms of accountability can serve to undermine progress in equity can inform the conversation.

Practicing administrators and university faculty can locate epistemological perspectives within educational debates (e.g. accountability or the "knowledge base of educational administration"), and ask themselves where do their views and practices fall along the exclusivism/pluralism continuum. We must find new ways to "live with each other" in the midst of our differences while maintaining our commitment to democratic ends.

References

Bensimon, Estelle, M. (1991). A feminist reinterpretation of president's definitions of leadership. Peabody Journal of Education, 66(3), 143-155.

Britzman, Deborah (1995). Is there a queer pedagogy? Or, stop reading straight. Educational Theory, 45(2), 151-165.

Brown, Lou, Branston, M. B., Hamre-Niutski, S., Pumpian, I., Centro, N., & Bruenwald, L. (1982). A strategy for developing chronological age appropriate content for severely handicapped adolescents and young adults. Journal of Special Education, 13, 81-90.

Burrell Gibson, & Morgan, Gareth (1989). Sociological paradigms and organizational analysis. London: Heinemann.

Capper, Colleen A., Fraturra-Kampschroer, Elise, and Keyes, Maureen (in press). Meeting the needs of students of all abilities: Leading beyond inclusion. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Cherryholmes, Cleo (1988). Power and criticism: Poststructural investigations in education. NY: Teachers College Press.

Cherryholmes, Cleo (1993). Reading research. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 25(1), 1-32.

Christensen, Linda (1999). `High-stakes' harm. Rethinking Schools, 13(3), 14, 18.

Eck, Diana (1995). Encountering God: A spiritual journey from Bozeman to Banaras. Boston: Beacon Press.

Hill-Collins, Patricia (1991). Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment. NY: Routledge.

Hill-Collins, Patricia (1998). Fighting *words*: Black women and the search for justice. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Honeychurch, Kenn Gardner (1996). Researching dissident subjectivities: Queering the grounds of theory and practice. Harvard Educational Review, 66(2), 339-355.

Gitlin, Andrew (1994). Power and method: Political activism and educational research. NY: Routledge.

Lincoln, Yvonna & Guba (1990). The paradigm dialogue.

Lather, Patti (1991). Getting smart: Feminist research and pedagogy with/in the postmodern. NY: Routledge.

Luke, Carmen (1992). Feminist politics in radical pedagogy. In Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore (Eds.). Feminisms and critical pedagogy (25-53). NY: Routledge.

Lyman, Kate (1999). Monkeys, pouches, and reading. Rethinking Schools, 13(3), 9.

Peterson, Bob, & Neill, John (1999). Alternatives to standardized tests. Rethinking Schools, 13(3), 1, 4-5, 28.

Popkewitz, Thomas (1984). Paradigm and ideology in education research: The social functions of the intellectual. NY: Falmer Press.

Rethinking Schools (1999, Spring). Why the testing craze won't fix our schools. 13(3). Miwaukee, WI.

Scheurich, James, J. (1997). Research method in the postmodern. Falmer Press.

Scheurich James, J., & Young, Michelle (1997). Coloring epistemologies: Are our research epistemologies racially biased? Educational Researcher, 26(4), 4-16.

Sirtonik, Kenneth & Oakes, Jeannie (1986). Critical perspectives on the organization and improvement of schooling. Boston: Kluwer-Nijhoff.

Table 1

Toward Epistemological Pluralism

(c) Colleen Capper, 1999

Exclusivism	**Inclusivism**	**Pluralism**
-Our perspective is the one correct perspective of the world.	-Our perspective is the superior view and our view is so superior it includes all other perspectives within it.	-"Truths" and ways of knowing and learning are not and cannot be captured by one particular perspective.
-Certain writers, teachers, or ideas harbor the one correct view of the world.	-Our perspective is like a wide umbrella with our particular view being the umbrella and all other views are underneath (beneath?) it.	-Epistemology is beyond any one tradition and that there is something to be learned from all traditions.
-We toss around particular writers, teachers, etc. as a way to legitimate our ideas.	-We take someone else's perspectives or values and incorporate them into our own and our perspective always comes out on top (". . .what you are saying is just like. . . . .")	-Pluralism is not diversity. Diversity is a fact of life. Pluralism is a response to diversity.

-We view other perspectives as threatening.	-We spend much time and energy translating and sorting through other perspectives to fit our own.	-Pluralism is not relativism where we believe that a commitment to a particular perspective is pointless.
-This position is marked by strict boundaries around identity.	-We include other epistemologies on our own terms and use our own language to interpret other epistemologies.	-Pluralism suggests we may feel more comfortable with a particular perspective but allow ourselves to explore other approaches.
-We view choice as threatening.		-We can maintain our commitment to our perspective but be open to looking at other perspectives.
-We are highly negative toward other ways of knowing.		-Just because we can learn something from all epistemologies, does not mean we abandon our preferred epistemology.

-We do not participate in dialogue, but debate to win.		-When we begin exploring or being open to learning from other perspectives, we can't help but be changed, a change that can include deepening into our own perspective with renewed openness.
-Often those from nontraditional perspectives or marginalized group status are afraid not to be exclusive for fear their epistemology and personhood will be absorbed into the dominant epistemology.		

Figure 1. Toward Epistemological Pluralism
(c) Colleen Capper, 1999

Structural Functional Uses of Standardized Assessments

Capper, C.A., Keyes, M.. W., Hafner, M. M.. (1999) Toward a Pluralistic View of Accountability: Possibilities and Troublings Paper presented at the University Council for Educational Administration, Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN, October 28-31.

1. We use the results to determine patterns of performance within certain groups.

2. We examine those who do not perform well and provide treatments to increase their performance.

3. We use results data to generate more resources for students/classrooms/schools in need.

4. We reinforce to students and families the significance of the test results.

5. We work to make tests more accurate in measuring what students learn.

Feminist Poststructural Approaches to Accountability

Capper, C.A., Keyes, M.. W., Hafner, M. M.. (1999) Toward a Pluralistic View of Accountability: Possibilities and Troublings Paper presented at the University Council for Educational Administration, Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN, October 28-31.

1. We make the accountability discourse visible as a discourse that is not neutral.

2. We use this visibility to help us plan ways to maneuver within the system to ensure student success.

3. While maneuvering within the system, we recognize the limits of the system and we continue to work toward overhauling it.

Feminist Poststructural Uses of Standardized Assessments

Capper, C.A., Keyes, M.. W., Hafner, M. M.. (1999) Toward a Pluralistic View of Accountability: Possibilities and Troublings Paper presented at the University Council for Educational Administration, Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN, October 28-31.

1. We work with students to question the origins and purposes of the assessments.

2. With our students we scrutinize the test scores, comparing schools and disaggregating the data based on disability, gender, race, social class, etc.

3. We question how the test results are used.

4. We examine the content and format of the test which can include examining the vocabulary, how questions are constructed, the objectives, how

analogies are constructed, and how often the vocabulary reflects upper class culture.

5. With our students, we write our own achievement tests, based on our own cultures and the culture of our school.

6. We discuss with families and students the different discourses of accountability in the school.

7. We dialogue with students that test results are not an indicate of innate ability.

8. We use the tests as only one measure of student learning and teacher performance.

9. We use the test results to ask ourselves what we can do differently.

Table 2
Questions to Determine if We are Taking a Pluralist Approach

1. Did we show that truths and ways of knowing and learning are not and cannot be captured by one particular perspective?

2. Did we show that we can learn something from all traditions?

3. Did we suggest that we believe a commitment to a particular perspective is important and that all perspectives are not "relative" to one another?

4. Did we maintain our commitment to our perspective but were open to looking at other perspectives?

5. Just because we can learn something from all epistemologies, did we abandon our preferred epistemology?

6. Were our views changed in anyway by examining perspectives other than our own and did that examination result in us deepening our own perspective?

Handout 2.1

Questions to Determine if We Are Taking a Pluralist Approach

Capper, C.A., Keyes, M.. W., Hafner, M. M.. (1999) Toward a Pluralistic View of Accountability: Possibilities and Troublings Paper presented at the University Council for Educational Administration, Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN, October 28-31.

1. Did we show that truths and ways of knowing and learning are not and cannot be captured by one particular perspective?

2. Did we show that we can learn something from all traditions?

3. Did we show that a commitment to a particular perspective is important and that all perspectives are not "relative" to one another?

4. Did we maintain our commitment to our perspective but were open to looking at other perspectives?

5. Just because we can learn something from all perspectives, did we abandon our preferred perspective?

6. Were our views changed in anyway by examining perspectives other than our own and did that examination result in us deepening our own perspective?

Table 3

Questions to Determine if We are Taking an Exclusivist Approach

1. Do we believe that our perspective is the one correct perspective of the world?
2. Do we believe that particular writers, scholars, or ideas harbor the one correct view of the world?
3. Do we toss around particular writers, authors, scholars as a way to legitimate our ideas?
4. Do we view other perspectives or choices as threatening?
5. Are we highly negative toward other ways of knowing?
6. Do we seek to debate with other perspectives to win, rather than seeking dialogue for further understanding?

Handout 3.1

Questions to Determine if We are Taking an Exclusivist Approach

Capper, C.A., Keyes, M.. W., Hafner, M. M.. (1999) Toward a Pluralistic View of Accountability: Possibilities and Troublings Paper presented at the University Council for Educational Administration, Annual Conference, Minneapolis, MN, October 28-31.

1. Do we believe that our perspective is the one correct perspective of the world?

2. Do we believe that particular writers, scholars, or ideas harbor the one correct view of the world?

3. Do we toss around particular writers, authors, scholars as a way to legitimate our ideas?

4. Do we view other perspectives or choices as threatening?

5. Are we highly negative toward other ways of knowing?

6. Do we seek to debate with other perspectives to win, rather than seeking dialogue for further understanding?

Endnotes

1. The descriptions of each of the different kinds of assessments are taken from Capper, Fraturra-Kampschroer, & Keyes.